

# **“This Body That Beats”: Roland Barthes and Robert Schumann’s *Kreisleriana***

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Music theory is undergoing a mini-revolution. Recent encounters with structuralist and poststructuralist critical theory and linguistics have enabled music theorists to view their discipline with fresh eyes and to listen to music with fresh ears. Among the authors whose work has significantly impacted musical studies is the French literary theorist, Roland Barthes (1915-80). No other contemporary critical theorist has written more about music than Barthes, who also wrote about film, photography, the visual arts, fashion, professional wrestling, Japanese puppet theater, and, of course, literature. What is more, no other contemporary critical theorist has written so convincingly about a single composer—or a single piece—as Barthes does in “Rasch” (1975), an essay about Robert Schumann’s piano cycle *Kreisleriana*.

Certain music theorists have attempted to apply Barthes’s theories to the analysis of music, most notably Patrick McCreless, who has presented an analysis of Beethoven’s Op. 70, No. 1 that incorporates aspects of Barthes’s theory of narrative codes and Heinrich Schenker’s theory of structural levels.<sup>1</sup> My paper, however, differs from many earlier efforts because it takes Barthes on his own terms. Using “Rasch” as the centerpiece of my argument, I intend to present a thoroughly “Barthesian” analysis of the A section of *Kreisleriana*’s second movement that is at once faithful to the spirit of Barthes’s later, poststructuralist writings, while also being cast in musical terms concrete enough to allow us to examine other works of music in a similar way.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick McCreless, “Roland Barthes’s S/Z from a Musical Point of View,” *In Theory Only* 10, no. 7 (1988): 1-29. See also John Novak, “Barthes’s Narrative Codes as a Technique for the Analysis of Programmatic Music: An Analysis of Janáček’s *The Fiddler’s Child*,” *Indiana Theory Review* 18, no. 1 (1997): 25-64.

<sup>2</sup> To a certain degree, I take my lead from a comment made by Robert Samuels in his essay, “Music as Text: Mahler, Schumann, and Issues in Analysis,” in *Theory, Analysis, and Meaning in Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 152-63. In discussing “Rasch,” Samuels asks a question—and, in effect, proposes a challenge: “For

What do I mean by “Barthesian”? What is Barthes saying that is so provocative? Consider this typically “Barthesian” passage—as it happens, the first lines of “Rasch”:

In Schumann’s *Kreisleriana* (Opus 16; 1838), I actually hear no note, no theme, no contour, no grammar, no meaning, nothing which would permit me to reconstruct an intelligible structure of the work. No, what I hear are blows: I hear what beats in the body, what beats the body, or better: I hear this body that beats.<sup>3</sup>

Bold, trenchant, deliberately cryptic, often downright baffling: this is quintessential Barthes. I do not intend herein to baffle, but to introduce a character that will play an important role in the analysis that follows—the title character, in fact: this body that beats. What is this body? Where might we find it in *Kreisleriana*? How and why and what is it “beating”? Each of these questions must be answered if we hope to hear *Kreisleriana* through Barthes’s ears—for that is the ultimate goal. But before we can answer them, we need to examine Barthes’s theories themselves and some of his writings on nonmusical subjects. For how Barthes hears is intricately related to how he reads, sees, and thinks.

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It would be wise first to make a distinction between structuralism and poststructuralism, since it is the latter with which we will be primarily concerned. Barthes is most often referred to as a structuralist and spent most of his career doing largely structuralist analyses. First set forth by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in the first decade of the twentieth century and later developed by, among others, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in the 1950s and 1960s, structuralism aimed to establish a science of

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our purposes, Barthes’s comments are suggestive; but his musical observations are only at the most informal level. If this metaphorical writing seems to capture something of music’s specificity, can we take the investigation . . . any further? What is it that Barthes hears in the *Kreisleriana*?” (162). I feel very strongly—and indeed felt very strongly, even after having read “Rasch” for the first time—that Barthes’s metaphorical writing does capture something of music’s specificity, and something of Schumann. As idiosyncratic and vague as Barthes’s observations about Schumann and *Kreisleriana* may be, he is clearly on to something—something that I believe can be brought to light and discussed in specifically musical terms.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, “Rasch,” in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 299.

language to uncover and explain the structure, or code, that allows a given language to impart meaning.<sup>4</sup> In the essay "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" (1966), Barthes dons his finest structuralist apparel and attempts to show how narrative is structured. He constructs a "typology" of narrative by systematically reducing it to its smallest meaningful units and then dividing those units into classes.<sup>5</sup> This sort of systematic, even clinical, analytical approach is one of the hallmarks of structural analyses.

Just a year later, however, with the publication of "The Death of the Author" (1967), Barthes begins to move toward *post*structuralism—and spends much of the rest of his career in poststructuralist attire. In this essay he attacks the idea that only the author controls the meaning of a text (a view shared by many poststructuralists). According to Barthes, meaning is generated by the act of reading as much as by the act of writing, and thus there can be no final authority that dictates the meaning of a text—and, it follows, no way of determining once and for all how a text is structured.<sup>6</sup> We cannot look at a text clinically as a structuralist would to determine how it works or what it means because we bring our own sensibilities to the table and are therefore hopelessly entangled with each text we confront. Barthes accordingly begins to conceive of a meaning that cannot be codified or "structurally situated,"<sup>7</sup> one that is slippery and evasive, but also—and this is important—evident, alluring, persistent. This is the sort of meaning that he hears in *Kreiseriana*.

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<sup>4</sup> Structural linguistics sprang out of a deliberate reaction to and rejection of historical linguistics, which for years had been the predominant approach to studying language. Whereas historical linguists had largely concerned themselves with the evolution and origin of languages (often in search of what they called an *Ur-language*), structural linguists sought to isolate language itself as an object of study, irrespective of its history and development. Structuralism's main goal was to show how language worked in the present, not how it developed over time.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 79-124.

<sup>6</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, 142-48. This belief should not be mistaken for nihilism. Precisely the opposite, in fact: if the underlying structure of a text must inevitably elude us, then that should give us all the more reason to revisit a text indefinitely in search of something more—because, quite simply, there will always be something more, and each time we will have to look more closely—and likely from a different angle—to find it. For poststructuralists, therefore, meaning is not absent; it is everywhere.

<sup>7</sup> Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in *Responsibility*, 54.

It might not come as a surprise that with Barthes's conceptual shift toward poststructuralism comes a greater interest in music, the art form that has always been noted for its ability to impart vague and powerful meanings that cannot always be articulated with words. Interestingly enough, music is conspicuously absent from Barthes's earlier writings. As Barbara Engh notes, even when Barthes catalogues the various forms of narrative in "Introduction to the Analysis of Narratives," music does not appear on the list—though myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news, and conversation do.<sup>8</sup> But as Barthes begins to articulate a meaning that his "intellection cannot absorb, a meaning both persistent and fugitive, apparent and evasive,"<sup>9</sup> music becomes for him the best example of that phenomenon.

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Barthes uses several different terms to describe this apparent and evasive meaning. In an essay from 1970 he speaks of a "third meaning," which he finds in certain photographic stills.<sup>10</sup> In one of his last works, *Camera Lucida* (1980), a meditation on photography and the death of his mother, he uses the term *punctum* (that which immediately pricks us, provokes us, animates us, wounds us even), distinguishing it from the *studium* (that which creates a general, dispassionate interest, whose effect derives from prior knowledge or "a certain training").<sup>11</sup> The third meaning and the *punctum* are for the most part synonymous, but I will deal with the former in more detail. The concept is admittedly vague, but familiar. Each of us has doubtless experienced a third meaning in some form or another—when listening intently to a particular piece of music, standing transfixed before a work of art, or engrossed in a novel. The third meaning is that which wounds us but somehow resists explanation or definition.

Consider this photographic still from Barthes's essay.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara Engh, "Loving It: Music and Criticism in Roland Barthes," in *Musicology and Difference*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 69.

<sup>9</sup> Barthes, "The Third Meaning," 44.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-62.

<sup>11</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1981), 26.

<sup>12</sup> Barthes, "The Third Meaning," 54, image XVI. The image originally appeared in the Russian film *Ordinary Fascism* by Mikhail Romm.

Figure 1.



Barthes reads three levels of meaning in this image. The first, which he calls “informational,” is the most accessible of the three.<sup>13</sup> In the simplest sense, what “information” does this still impart to us? It shows a man shooting a bow and arrow and a crowd standing behind him. Who is the man? Why are the people watching him? Let us leave those questions aside for now, since they are beyond the scope of the first level of meaning. Although we might of course gather more information—and note, for example, the boy carrying the arrows, the bald man standing directly behind the archer, the kinds of clothing being worn—at this purely descriptive level, we need not be concerned with what these images might connote or symbolize.

At the second level, which Barthes calls “symbolic” (which can be associated with the *studium*), he reads “an obvious meaning, that of fascism

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 41.

(an aesthetics and symbolics of strength, the theatrical hunt).”<sup>14</sup> To glean this meaning, we must know that the archer is not just any man; he is Hermann Goering. Unlike the informational level, then, the symbolic level assumes prior knowledge: to recognize these symbols, we must know something about the fascists (who they were, what they did, how they dressed, and so on).<sup>15</sup>

But does that satisfy us? Or is there something else here—beyond the symbolic—that captivates us, pricks us, and makes it difficult to put the image aside? Barthes “readily reads” a third meaning, a *punctum*, in

the (again) disguised blond stupidity of the youth carrying the arrows, the slackness of his hands and his mouth, . . . Goering’s coarse nails, his trashy ring, . . . the vapid smile of the man in glasses in the background, obviously an ass-kisser.<sup>16</sup>

Not everyone will glean the same third meaning that Barthes does. And that is as it should be. In the passage above Barthes describes the third meaning that *he* perceives, fully aware that others might be wounded in different ways. But Barthes is convinced—as am I—that all of us who study this image will find something mesmerizing about it (or if not this image, then another)—something that strikes us, though we may not know how or where, works on us, holds us in its gaze, and then evades us. This is its third meaning.

Having located the third meaning in a photographic still, can we do the same with music—or, more specifically, with *Kreisleriana*? We would be remiss if we attempted to map all three of Barthes’s meanings onto music; the point of an interdisciplinary study such as this is not to construct a complete, and likely artificial, concordance, but to open up avenues of inquiry that could not have been conceived of otherwise. But there is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>15</sup> When Barthes uses the word “obvious,” he does not necessarily mean that the second meaning is banal or simple; the Latin word *obvius* can mean “moving ahead,” which, according to Barthes, is “just the case with this meaning, which seeks me out” (“The Third Meaning,” 41). If we already possess some prior knowledge, then, the symbolic meaning “presents itself quite naturally to the mind” (44). For a convenient example of “symbolic” meaning in the music literature, consider Wagner’s use of *leitmotifs*—musical symbols for concepts such as life, death, fate, and so forth.

<sup>16</sup> Barthes, “The Third Meaning,” 54.

room—and a need—to explore how the third meaning might manifest itself in music.

In "Rasch" Barthes explains that *Kreisleriana*'s third meaning has to do with how its body beats. "Body," as Barthes uses the word, refers not only to his own body, the place where the third meaning makes its mark, but also to the music's body, the place where the third meaning resides. Barthes is acutely aware that our comprehension of music is related to our body's experience with it. (Anyone who has seen conductors or performers, whose bodies become almost possessed by a work of music, will attest to the role the body plays in comprehending and conveying musical meaning.) He is also aware that Schumann's music generates a particular sort of third meaning because its body—what Barthes calls the "Schumannian body"—pulses and moves in ways that other composers' "bodies" do not.<sup>17</sup> "Beat" also has a Barthesian connotation that differs from the conventional, musical one. Barthes's beats are not necessarily regular or patterned—not like the pulses underlying a meter or those sounded by a drummer who "keeps the beat." His beats are more semiotic than musical. Like the slack-jawed youth and Goering's trashy ring, the beats are the vaguely meaningful moments, the details that catch our attention or prick us. In *Kreisleriana*, they are what make the body (our body and the Schumannian body) "flinch."<sup>18</sup> Collectively, the beats comprise a third meaning.

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In light of the previous discussion, let us consider Barthes's description of the opening of *Kreisleriana*'s second movement (see example 1, the A section of this rounded binary form):

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<sup>17</sup> Barthes, "Rasch," 300.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 304. There is a sensuality—even sexuality—about Barthes's metaphor. Indeed, much has been written about the strain of eroticism in Barthes's work—and how it might or might not shed light on his homosexuality (which, incidentally, he never discussed candidly). See in particular Pierre Saint-Amand, "The Secretive Body: Roland Barthes's Gay Erotics," *Yale French Studies* 90 (1996): 153-71; D.A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Frances Bartowski, "Roland Barthes's Secret Garden," *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 5, no. 2 (1981): 133-46. Unfortunately, there is not enough space to discuss Barthes's eroticism in detail, but it is important to keep in mind that his experience with *Kreisleriana* is indeed highly sensual—almost like a consummation of his body and the Schumannian body.

## Example 1.

Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch

Annotations in the score include: *p*, *sf*, *sf*, *p*; *I*, *V*<sup>7</sup>, *I*, *V*<sup>7</sup>; *I*, *V*<sup>8</sup><sub>4</sub>, *V*<sup>7</sup><sub>3</sub>, *V*; *F-F octave*, *F-F octave*, *F-F octave stretched out*, *vaporization*; *melody splits into two strands*, *D5 stretched out*; *delayed = the beat downbeat*.

Pacification, at least in the *Kreisleriana*, is always a *stretching out*: the body stretches, distends, extends itself toward its extreme form, . . . Is there a better-dreamed-of stretching (as we have seen) than that of the second variation [i.e., the second movement]?<sup>19</sup>

How exactly does this passage, the opening eight measures of the movement, stretch out and pacify? On a superficial level, the melody in mm. 1 and 3 stretches upward to the G octave. At another level, mm. 5-8 stretch out material from mm. 1-4. Measures 1-8 constitute a musical sentence, in

<sup>19</sup> Barthes, "Rasch," 304. This is one of the only comments Barthes makes about this particular movement. Barthes tends to speak generally about *Kreisleriana* as a whole, or even about Schumann's music as a whole; I have simply used those general comments to shed light on specific musical examples. Keep in mind, then, that most of these quotations—except the one above, of course—suggest what Barthes might have said about passages in this movement, but not necessarily what he did say.



which a short two-measure basic idea (mm. 1-2) is stated, repeated, and then expanded into four measures (mm. 5-8).<sup>20</sup> Measure 5 begins just as mm. 1 and 3 do, with the rising B $\flat$ -C-D motive, labeled "x" in example 1, but the D5 in m. 5 is stretched out over nearly a full measure. Likewise, the octave descent F5-F4, which occupies only about three beats both times it appears in the first four bars (mm. 1-2 and mm. 3-4), is later extended across three measures (mm. 6-8). This passage as a whole is also pacifying, as evidenced by the simple, unadorned harmonic progression and the relative absence of dissonance until mm. 7-8.

But, as I asked before with regards to the photographic still, does that reading satisfy us? Or is there something else here—beyond the outward pacification—that captivates us, pricks us, beats us, and makes it difficult to put the music aside? According to Barthes, the third meaning in much of Schumann's piano music stems from "something radical,"<sup>21</sup> an underlying texture of beats that threatens to unravel the musical fabric and unsettle the music's stretched out and pacified body. That "something radical" might be difficult to articulate (as indeed it should be; it is, after all, fugitive and evasive), but it is apparent, and it is Barthes who articulates it most clearly. He believes that Schumann's music is "threatened with disarticulation, dissociation, with movements not violent (nothing harsh) but brief and, one might say, ceaselessly 'mutant.'"<sup>22</sup> Barthes captures the same idea when he calls Schumann a "vigilant sauce chef, who keeps the discourse from 'setting.'"<sup>23</sup>

How, then, does Schumann stir the sauce in this passage? How is the passage disarticulated? Let us consider the meter first. Though a  $\frac{3}{4}$  reading is of course possible—indeed probable—the meter is not altogether clear. The first four measures, for example, could be heard in  $\frac{6}{8}$  if we were to hear the second F in m. 1 as falling on a dotted-quarter pulse. They could just as easily be heard in simple duple meter, if we were to hear the first two eighth notes as a downbeat rather than an upbeat; the pattern repetition in the

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<sup>20</sup> I use the term "sentence" here as it has been most recently defined by William Caplin, in which a short basic idea is presented, often repeated, and then followed by a continuation and cadence. See Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Barthes, "Loving Schumann," in *Responsibility*, 295.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Barthes, "Rasch," 300.

melody (four eighth notes up, four down) reinforces a simple duple hearing. Measures 5-8 are even more metrically ambiguous than mm. 1-4. The triplets in the inner voices of mm. 7-8 wreak havoc with the melody and disrupt any sense of metrical regularity (all the more so if we have been hearing the previous measures in  $\frac{6}{8}$  and grouping the eighth notes in threes). The metrical fog is in fact so dense in m. 7 that the octave Fs that emerge from it sound not like a downbeat at all, but somehow delayed, as if the previous beat were prolonged slightly. (As we shall see, this is not the first time that Schumann will delay the dominant's arrival when approaching a cadence.) The sudden accumulation of chromatic pitches in mm. 7 and 8 (circled in example 1) create a subtle harmonic ambiguity as well. I use the adjective "subtle" because there is no doubt that the underlying harmony in these measures is  $V^7/V$ . Nonetheless, foreign elements blur the harmonic texture. Finally, note the melodic disarticulation in mm. 5-8. In m. 5 the melodic line splits into two strands—or limbs—as the opening melody goes underground and a new upper voice rises above it. This calls into question our hearing of the melody in mm. 1-4, which, it turns out, is an accompaniment to the "real" melody that emerges in m. 5.<sup>24</sup> What we hear in mm. 1-8, then, is the gradual vaporization of a musical body—"nothing harsh," but certainly evident and "threatened with disarticulation."<sup>25</sup> Metrically, harmonically, and melodically, the Schumannian body grows increasingly diffuse and disarticulated as it approaches the cadence in m. 8.

Where, then, is the beat? The third meaning may be related to that slow and subtle diffusion and disarticulation, but where exactly are we pricked? When do we recognize what has happened to the musical body? Can we pinpoint a particular moment analogous to the beats Barthes pinpoints in the photographic still of Goering and his entourage? I "flinch"—and, as it were, take a beat—when the octave Fs emerge clumsily from the haze of m. 7. At this precise moment I realize how disarticulated the body has grown over the course of the first eight bars. Ironically enough, it is only when the body regains its composure that I fully recognize what has happened.

Measures 9-20 (example 2, the B section of this rounded binary form) also progress from clarity to cloudiness, even more noticeably than the first

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<sup>24</sup> Barthes would likely call this a "bifurcation": "[T]he Schumannian body knows only bifurcations . . . [I]t does not construct itself, it keeps diverging" ("Rasch," 301).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. no. 22 above.

eight measures.<sup>26</sup>

Example 2.

The musical score for Example 2 consists of three systems of piano music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system (measures 9-13) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a triplet in the bass staff. It features a  $V^7/IV$  chord in measure 10, a disarticulation in measure 11, and a  $IV$  chord in measure 12, ending with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system (measures 14-17) shows a progression of chords:  $ii^6$  in measure 14,  $vi$  in measure 15,  $ii$  in measure 16, and  $vi$  in measure 17. The third system (measures 18-20) includes a  $V^7/V$  chord in measure 18, which is then "obscured" in measure 19. Measure 20 features an "infusion of chromaticism" and a  $V^4_3$  chord, with the annotation "nearly dissipates" above it. A final annotation "thinks of something else the beat" is placed below the  $V^4_3$  chord.

<sup>26</sup> The B section is in fact an amplification of the A section. Note, for instance, that the large-scale harmonic motion in both passages is I-V (the  $V^7/IV$  in m. 10 is heard as a destabilized tonic). Within this amplification—or, we might say, this stretching out—over mm. 9-20, Schumann inserts a  $IV$  chord in m. 12 and an elaborated  $ii$  chord in mm. 13-16.

The clouds begin to gather, albeit lightly, in mm. 9-13. Note, for example, the progressive diminution of the bass's upbeats—first two eighths, then a triplet, then four sixteenths, and finally a trill—which result in a thickening of the texture and an intensification of rhythmic energy. (Again, the vapor accumulates most heavily around the cadence, as it did in mm. 7-8.) The densest clouds, however, are on the horizon. Measures 13-16 are straightforward harmonically and metrically (the oscillation from ii to vi recalls the oscillation from I to V in mm. 1-4, another straightforward passage), but the same cannot be said of mm. 17-20. In mm. 17-18 Schumann places nonchord tones on strong beats, particularly in the upper voice, thereby displacing chord tones to weak beats. (All of the metrically accented nonchord tones in mm. 17-18 are circled in example 2.) As a result, the  $V^7/V$  sonority is obscured by the vertical dissonances created between the upper voice and the inner voices, whose chord tones fall more normatively on strong beats. (See, for example, the “cluster” sonorities, D3-F4-E5 and D3-C5-E5, marked with asterisks in example 2.) The infusion of chromatic pitches in mm. 19-20 further clouds the underlying harmony. In addition, the meter is even more ambiguous in mm. 17-20 than in mm. 1-8: the Cs in the bass, beginning in m. 17, suggest  $\frac{3}{4}$ , but the upper voices sound almost meterless, partially because of the displacement of chord tones mentioned above. Barthes writes that in mm. 17-20 “everything converges”<sup>27</sup>—and indeed it does, so much so that the Schumannian body, engulfed by the thick harmonic and metrical vapor, nearly dissipates in a flutter of sixteenth notes in m. 20.

This measure is worth discussing in detail, for it is arguably one of the most “pricking” moments in the excerpt. We have been expecting—needing—a V chord (i.e., a resolution to the local tonic, F major) since the secondary dominant in m. 17, but again Schumann withholds it. And when the dominant does finally arrive, it is only a sixteenth note in duration, a mere  $V^{\frac{4}{3}}$  that dissolves into the reprise of the A theme.<sup>28</sup> Just as the octave Fs in m. 8 allowed us to recognize what had happened over the course of the first eight measures, so too does this beat, this prick, in its sheer

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>28</sup> Measures 17-20 are in many ways typical of a retransition section in a rounded binary form, in that they use a dominant prolongation. They prolong the “wrong” dominant, however ( $V^7/V$  rather than  $V^7$ ), and the fleeting  $V^{\frac{4}{3}}$  does little to counteract the tension that this prolongation creates.

understatement, make us all the more aware of the surrounding ambiguity. The body holds itself together, of course—for the movement does continue—but the vapor is so thick here than even the sudden moment of clarity that follows it, when the theme returns in m. 21, is somehow not enough of a resolution; the Schumannian body simply “thinks of something else,”<sup>29</sup> and the clouds are left hanging in the air.

Example 3.

Im Tempo

21

*p*

*sf*

*sf*

I V<sup>7</sup> I V<sup>7</sup>

underlying harmonies veiled by chromaticism

dominant dissolves

25

*rit.*

*p*

V<sup>3</sup>/<sub>ii</sub> → V/V → V ----> I

After the first four bars of the A' section (example 3, mm. 21-28), the Schumannian body again “thinks of something else,” and, within no time, the cloudiness returns. As in mm. 19-20 (and also mm. 7-8), the underlying harmonies of mm. 25-28 are veiled by chromaticism. And as in the first eight measures of the movement, the melody in mm. 25-28 projects  $\frac{6}{8}$  as well as  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Note especially the slurs in m. 26 and the neighbor figures in the upper

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 300.

three voices (circled in example 3)—all of which imply a compound duple meter. Most striking, however, is the way Schumann once again delays the resolution to the dominant and then glances over it. The dominant in m. 28 is of course a local point of arrival—the music crescendos to it, and it falls on a downbeat—but its half-note length is disproportionately short when compared to the V/V and its dominant, the  $V\frac{4}{3}/ii$ , which together occupy three measures. Moreover, no sooner than the dominant has been articulated, it dissolves as the upper and lower voices converge once more.

The clouds finally part in the codetta, beginning in m. 29 (example 4). In this section, perhaps the first bona fide arrival of the movement, the body relaxes, and the threat of dissolution is largely lifted. The  $B\flat$  pedal grounds us harmonically and metrically (the  $\frac{3}{4}$  meter is clearest in this section), and the inner voices cascade in parallel motion, as if the diverging and converging lines of mm. 17-20 have finally learned how to work together. Note as well that the melody proceeds in a descending sequence, which provides some semblance of closure, like a sigh of relief after the struggles of the previous passages. (I have stemmed the  $G5-F5-E\flat5$  linear progression created by the sequence.)

Yet the codetta does not entirely disperse the clouds that have been gathering since the opening eight measures. In mm. 34-36—a final moment of uncertainty—the cascading lines converge and, in fact, intersect. Right and left hand cross over one another in m. 35, and the two threads continue along their trajectories: the right hand  $E\flat3$  (m. 36) resolves to the left hand  $D3$  (m. 37), which is at that moment covered by the return of  $F4$  in the right hand. The result is an acceleration toward the cadence—which is, of course, not uncommon. But to accelerate here, after a passage that has finally found repose, is to threaten the Schumannian body one last time. As in m. 20 (just prior to the return of the opening theme), a spasm of sixteenth notes precedes the final cadence, and—yet again—the strength of the dominant is compromised. Temporally it weighs enough, but not harmonically, since it is in second inversion. Even here, at the end of this rounded binary form (the A section of the larger rondo), all is not completely clear.

## Example 4.

first bona fide arrival

29

I

grounding B $\flat$  pedal

33

rit.

another spasm of 16ths

Adagio

p

upper and lower voices intersect

ii° V $\frac{3}{4}$  I

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Looking back over the entire excerpt, we can see that each formal section (mm. 1-8, mm. 9-20, mm. 21-28, and even mm. 29-37) consists of a wave of motion, like a drawn-out bodily gesture, that progresses from clarity to cloudiness, articulation to disarticulation. What, then, is the overall effect of this excerpt if we consider all these waves of motion—and the beats that they create? The third meaning, after all, has a great deal to do with that overall effect. We cannot escape the fact that the moments of cloudiness far outweigh the moments of clarity, no matter how pacifying the excerpt seems on the surface and how much temporary repose the body finds in the codetta. Even the clearest moments—like the opening four bars or the first four bars of the reprise—are simply too brief and disconnected from the ambiguity that surrounds them to turn the tide.

Barthes's words might help us to articulate that overall effect. Recall that, according to Barthes, there is "something radical" about Schumann's music. "This radicality," he proceeds to explain, "has some relation to madness."<sup>30</sup> "Madness" seems an oddly appropriate term for this movement, considering the metrical ambiguity, the beats created by the delayed and shortchanged dominants, and the imbalance between moments of cloudiness and clarity. There is indeed something maddening about the various meters vying for authority in the opening bars. I hear madness as well in the ephemeral  $V\frac{4}{3}$  of m. 20 that attempts to resolve the weighty and prolonged  $V^7/V$  that precedes it, the return of the A theme that thereby overpowers the  $V\frac{4}{3}$ , and, more generally, Schumann's continual undermining of the dominant harmony. Some may of course object that "madness" is too severe a word to describe this music with its almost pastoral quality. And they would be right if they were thinking of a wild, violent, frenetic madness. But that is not the sort of madness Barthes is describing. His madness is not violent, but internalized—apparent and evasive. Like the texture of beats, it does not throb or pound, but simply persists. It is a madness that, strangely, coexists with pacification.

We are in gray territory here. But it is in this territory—in that odd commingling of pacification and disturbance, calm and uncertainty—that we might be able to make out the dim outlines of a third meaning. I hear a third meaning somewhere in the undercurrent of madness; in the beats; in the metrical, harmonic, and melodic ambiguity; in the gradual fraying of the Schumannian body; and in the way those impulses interact with what appears to be a well behaved and pacified framework.

One question remains: why is all this necessary? Why does Barthes's own analysis need to be translated into the language of music theory if, as he points out, the third meaning can be apprehended by anyone, regardless of training or expertise? Are we doing Barthes a disservice by presuming to predicate what he hears? Barthes, after all, is not especially fond of what he calls "professional analysis," which, in his estimation, merely identifies and arranges "themes," "cells," "phrases": "it risks bypassing the body; composition manuals are so many ideological objects, whose meaning is to annul the body."<sup>31</sup> We must of course take Barthes's scathing criticisms with a grain of salt. (One wonders, for instance, how many "professional"

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<sup>30</sup> Barthes, "Loving Schumann," 295.

<sup>31</sup> Barthes, "Rasch," 307.



analyses he read, and which ones.) But if the goal has been to hear *Kreisleriana* as Barthes does, then we must attempt to make something of the apparent incongruity. Can we—should we—study the *punctum*?

We need to recognize that whereas Barthes likes to claim that the third meaning is evasive, impossibly vague, indescribable, unable to be predicated or situated, he does in fact try to pin it down and describe it. He is not one to sit back and let the beats pound his body without examining his wounds and looking for an assailant. In this sense, my analysis is not as inconsistent with Barthes's theories as it might first seem—just as Barthes's own analyses are not always consistent with what he says about analysis in general. What I have done with *Kreisleriana* is in fact similar to what Barthes does with the photographic still: I have located the details that beat and prick and then attempted to explain how and why they do so. Even if this analysis does not resonate with all of Barthes's ideas, my attempt to translate Barthes into the language of music theory can be justified by my own experience with this excerpt's third meaning. Only after I had pulled out the familiar and trustworthy tools of music theory and rigorously explore the insides of *Kreisleriana* did its beats grow loud enough for me to hear them.

A final word: keep in mind that this is *my* analysis—and, ultimately, *my* third meaning. But it is not the only third meaning to be gleaned from the excerpt. Others might suffer entirely different wounds, or no wound at all for that matter. This is therefore not meant to be an authoritative hearing of the movement. (It cannot be, in fact, if the author is truly dead.) But it is, I think, a "Barthesian" one, faithful to the spirit of his writings on Schumann, even if it is framed in some terms he would never have used. So even if we do not hear exactly *what* Barthes hears, we can at least begin to appreciate *how* Barthes hears. And—even better—if we listen to *Kreisleriana*, or any work of music for that matter, through those ears, we might be wounded in ways we never imagined possible.